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Report of the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context, Raquel Rolnik

Addendum

Mission to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland: comments by the State on the report of the Special Rapporteur*

* Reproduced as received.

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Comments of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland on the report of the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context, Ms. Raquel Rolnik, following her mission to the United Kingdom (29 August- 11 September 2013)

I. Introduction

1. Since 2010 the Coalition Government has made significant progress in housing. Notable achievements so far include:

- Nearly 420,000 homes[1] have been delivered since April 2010.
- The latest official figures show that new housing construction orders have risen to the highest level since 2007[2].
- House building starts in the year to December 2013 are 23 per cent higher than the same period last year.[3]
- Significant investment in building new homes for private rent such as through the £10 billion Housing Guarantees Scheme and the £1 billion Build to Rent Fund.
- Under the previous government, the number of social homes fell by 420,000[4]. This Government has already delivered over 170,000 affordable homes over the last three years[5].
- Further investment of £23 billion to help ensure another 165,000 new affordable homes are started between 2015 and 2018. This will be the fastest annual rate of building for over 20 years.

2. The Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living undertook an official visit to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland from 29 August to 11 September 2013. At the time of the UNSR's visit the government expressed strong concerns about inaccuracies in her interim report.

3. The government believes that the UNSR's final report also contains a number of inaccuracies and omissions. For example, the report refers to 'increasing unemployment' yet the number of unemployed people aged 16 or over has fallen by 161,000 (6.5%) over the year to December 2013 from 2.5 million to 2.34 million.[6]The UNSR's recommendations are therefore not sound.

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[1] DCLG House Building: December Quarter 2013, England (20 February 2014)

[2] Office for National Statistics Output in the Construction Industry statistics, October 2013 (published 13 December 2013)

[3] DCLG House Building: December Quarter 2013, England (20 February 2014)

[4] DCLG Dwelling Stock, 2012-13, England (25 April 2013)

[5] DCLG Affordable Housing Supply, 2012-13, DCLG; Affordable housing starts and completions funded by the HCA and GLA, April-September 2013 (21 November 2013)

[6] ONS, Labour Market Statistics, published on 19 February 2014

4. Also the UNSR's report does not recognise the approach we are taking to encourage a localist approach towards housing development, by empowering local authorities and communities to influence what is built and where.

5. Our response to some of the key areas in the report is set out below.

II. Reforming the welfare system

6. *The UNSR's report recommends the government should:*

- *Assess and evaluate the impact of the welfare reform in relation to the right to adequate housing of the most vulnerable individuals and groups, in light of existing data and evidence; consider whether particular measures are having a disproportionate impact on specific groups; assess whether the overall costs of the implementation of some reforms might outweigh the savings intended, thereby violating the State's obligation to use the maximum of available resources; and consider alternative avenues to achieve similar objectives without affecting the poorest or most vulnerable*
- *Immediately suspend the removal of the spare-room subsidy and fully re-evaluate in light of the evidence of its negative impacts on the right to adequate housing and general well-being of many vulnerable individuals and households*

7. The UNSR makes a number of comments relating to the impact of our welfare reforms on housing but does not recognise the full range of actions the government is already taking to ensure that the impact of these policies on a wide range of individuals is carefully considered.

Housing benefit

8. In 2010, as part of our welfare reforms, the government took steps to manage housing benefit expenditure. Between 2000 and 2010 expenditure had almost doubled in cash terms, reaching £21 billion. Unreformed, by 2014-15, Housing Benefit would have cost over £25 billion (in cash terms). By 2014-15 the reforms will save over £2 billion annually.

9. To help to manage expenditure we are putting limits on the amount of housing benefit that people in the private and social rented sector are entitled to.

10. This will encourage people, based on their household size, to make sensible decisions about what they can reasonably afford as well as improve work incentives.

11. Even after these reforms housing benefit will be able to meet rents on £21,000 a year.

Removal of the spare room subsidy

12. The removal of the spare room subsidy affects working age social sector tenants who have all, or part of, their rent met by housing benefit, and live in accommodation which is larger than their needs.

13. This policy is about fairness; we are not forcing people to move but social sector tenants must make the same choices about affordability as those in the private rented sector already do; it is about making better use of social sector housing stock.

14. Another benefit of this policy is that it will encourage greater mobility within the social sector. We expect that as social sector tenants begin to take active decisions about what they need and can afford, larger properties will become available on a more frequent basis and so help the hundreds of thousands of families currently living in overcrowded conditions within both the private and social rented sectors. This group are often conveniently overlooked by opponents of this policy but with estimates suggesting that there are 249,000[7] overcrowded households, and 1.7 million households on social housing waiting lists in England alone,[8] something had to be done. At the same time there are 1.5 million spare bedrooms, in working age households in the social rented sector, across Great Britain as a whole, with 820,000 of these paid for by Housing Benefit[9].

15. We are implementing this policy fully aware that some households require additional support in adjusting to it.

16. For people needing overnight care: We have allowed an additional bedroom for claimants and their partners where one or both require regular overnight care.

17. For children with a disability who are unable to share: An extra room is allowed for a disabled child in receipt of the middle or higher rate care component of the Disability Living Allowance, where the nature of their disabilities mean that they would disturb the sleep of the child they are normally expected to share with i.e. they need constant overnight care and attention, or where there is a threat of violence i.e. the disabled child may have a cognitive impairment which affects the safety of the other child.

18. For families who foster or have children in the armed forces: in recognition of their role in the community and further afield, we have also allowed an additional room for approved foster carers, and for parents of adult children in the armed forces (or reservists) who normally live with them but are deployed on operations.

19. For people who need help to make the transition: We have trebled the support available with a total of £180 million available in Discretionary Housing Payment this year (2013/14); and £165 million for next year (2014/15). This will enable local authorities to provide additional support to households in most need and those requiring extra time to find suitable alternative accommodation, and so they can provide longer term support to vulnerable households.

20. For people who will need support longer term: £25 million of the Discretionary Housing Payment funding for 2013/14 is targeted specifically at disabled people who live in significantly adapted accommodation, and where it would be more costly for them to relocate while still remaining within their community and close to support. The amount of Discretionary Housing Payment funding available for the removal of the spare room subsidy will not be reduced for the next two years, which will help local authorities to make longer term awards to such households.

21. Furthermore in July 2013, the Divisional Court ruled that the provision of extra Discretionary Housing Payment funding is a proportionate approach to people affected by this policy and that the department had fulfilled its equality duties to disabled people who are affected by the policy.

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[7] DCLG English Housing Survey, 2011-12 (7 February, 2013)

[8] DCLG Local Authority Housing Statistics 2012-13, England (19 December 2013)

[9] Policy Simulation Model 2011/12 using reference data from the Family Resources Survey 2009/10

Impact assessments and evaluation

22. In advance of introducing policies the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) undertakes impact assessments; these include examining the effects of the proposed changes on various key equality criteria such as age, gender and disability. These impact assessments are published and scrutinised during, and updated after, each stage of the legislative process. DWP also reviews estimates of costs and savings generated from policy changes as part of the process around key fiscal events such as the annual Budget and Chancellors' Autumn Statement; these estimates are subject to scrutiny and challenge by the independent Office for Budgetary Responsibility before they can be included in these events.

23. The government carefully monitors and reviews the implementation of all its programmes.

III. Supporting people to buy their own home

24. The UNSR's report recommends that the Government should 'put in place targeted measures to increase the supply of housing in the private market for those individuals and households who face unaffordable alternatives, especially the young and those in the middle and lower ends of the spectrum.'

25. The government is committed to encouraging a strong and stable housing market. The latest figures show that the number of first-time buyers is at a five-year high [10], the number of repossessions are at their lowest since 2007[11] and that UK house price rises are below inflation rises in many places.[12]

26. However, transactions remain 40 per cent below pre-crunch levels in England[13] and we have introduced a range of initiatives to help homebuyers to purchase a new home.

27. Over 22,000 families have already reserved a new-build home under the Help to Buy - Equity Loan scheme and developers are responding to this demand by increasing their output of new-build homes.

28. A further 6,000 homebuyers have applied for mortgages under the Help to Buy - Mortgage Guarantee scheme[14]. The government has ensured that there are robust controls in place to review the impact of these schemes on the housing market and to make any changes if necessary.

29. The government also remains committed to enabling social tenants to purchase their homes through Right to Buy. So far this has helped nearly 2 million households to realise their aspirations to own their homes with over 13,400 sales having been achieved under our new re-invigorated scheme[15]. In addition, under this scheme, every additional home sold will be replaced by a new home for affordable rent nationally.

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[10] Gross Advances by purpose of loan, Council of Mortgage Lenders - PRA / FCA data (12 February 2014)

[11] Mortgage and Landlord possession statistics quarterly, July - September 2013, Ministry of Justice - based on data from the Council of Mortgage Lenders (14 November 2013)

[12] ONS house price data to end December 2013 (18 February 2014)

[13] Based on HM Land Registry annual transactions data for 2012

[14] Figures relate to the position as at the end December 2013

[15] Figures relate to the period April 2012 to end September 2013

IV. Improving the private rented sector

30. The UNSR's report recommends that the government should 'Increase regulation and enhance information and accountability in relation to the private rented sector; adopt regulatory tenancy protections, including minimum length of contracts, restraints on rent increases and strict limits on eviction; encourage the use of standardized human rights-compliant rental contracts; enhance mechanisms of registration of landlords and letting agents, and establish clear accountability mechanisms to eliminate discrimination in the private rented sector'

31. The government is clear that increasing the burden of regulation and making significant changes to the legislative underpinnings of the private rented sector are not the way to improve conditions for the growing number of people living in privately rented homes. The government's position is supported by recognised experts in the sector such as Professor Michael Ball (Henley Business School, University of Reading) and the findings of Sir Adrian Montague's review of the private rented sector.

32. The private rented sector now accounts for 17 per cent of housing[16]. Prior to the Housing Act 1988, the private rental market was in long-term decline in England, having dropped to just 9 per cent of the housing market in 1988. A return to such low levels in the supply of private rented housing would see rent levels, for those tenants who were able to find a home to live in, rise steeply and would hurt hard-working tenants. Prior to 1988, regulated rents and lifetime tenancies had meant that being a landlord was simply not commercially viable for many property owners and investors. By enabling landlords to charge market rents and introducing assured shorthold tenancies, the 1988 Act arrested this decline. Consequently, regulatory approaches such as rent control have been discredited and ruled out by successive administrations. The House of Commons' Select Committee gathered evidence on the private rented sector and published recommendations in July 2013. The Committee, having considered all of the evidence before it, found itself to be in full agreement with the government that additional regulation on rent levels and security of tenure should be avoided.

33. The rapid growth of the sector has been accompanied by improvements in the quality of rented accommodation, and satisfaction levels compare well to other tenures. Over 80 per cent of private tenants are very or fairly satisfied with their accommodation[17].

34. Nonetheless, the government recognises the importance of the private rented sector and is keen to encourage further growth through the supply of new high quality large scale development for private rent. Where abuses by landlords are taking place, then these need to be tackled, using the ample powers already available to local authorities. And the government is taking action to ensure that landlords and tenants are better informed of their rights and responsibilities.

Regulatory tenancy protections and minimum length of contracts

35. Whilst assured shorthold tenancies may have a fixed period of as little as six months, most tenancies in practice last for much longer - the median length of time that respondents to the English Housing Survey had been living in their accommodation is two

[16] DCLG Dwelling Stock series - Live Table 101: Dwelling stock by tenure, United Kingdom (historical series)

[17] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-housing-survey-household-report-2011-to-2012

years[18]. When tenancies do eventually come to an end, this is at the instigation either of the tenant or by mutual agreement in over 90 per cent of cases. Only 9 per cent of tenants move because they are asked to leave by the landlord[19].

36. Assured shorthold tenancies offer tenants a level of security even in the small minority of cases where the landlord wants the tenant to leave. So long as the tenant pays the rent and meets his obligations, a landlord cannot seek possession of the property through the courts during a fixed period of at least six months. Beyond the fixed period, the landlord must give at least two months' notice of wishing to take possession. Once the landlord gives notice, he cannot evict without obtaining a possession order from the court. If the landlord wishes to seek possession for 'grounds' (such as non-payment of rent), then he needs to go to court to seek possession, and the courts have discretion available to them, depending on the circumstances.

37. The processes by which an occupier of a property is evicted are governed by the Housing Act 1988 and the Protection from Eviction Act 1977. It is an offence to unlawfully evict or harass the residential occupier of a property. In October 2013, the government announced it would produce extra guidance for local councils on how to protect tenants from illegal eviction. The government is also considering how to ensure that tenants do not face the threat of eviction because they have asked the landlord to rectify a fault in the property or have asked the council to investigate.

38. Many tenants in the private rented sector value the flexibility that this accommodation provides and would oppose any change which would force them to stay in a property for longer than they would want. Nonetheless, the government recognises that, as a growing range of families live in the private rented sector, more tenants may want the stability afforded by longer term tenancies. There is nothing to stop landlords and tenants agreeing to longer tenancies already. However, a recent academic report commissioned by the Residential Landlords Association shows how some of the most vulnerable groups would be amongst the greatest losers if mandatory fixed-term contracts were introduced[20].

39. The government is actively encouraging investment in new-build privately rented property by institutional investors. As pioneering developments such as East Village and Stratford Halo in east London are showing, this will lead to greater availability of long-term tenancies, from investors who are looking for a stable long-term income stream. Furthermore, recognising that some people would welcome a standardised contract, the government is preparing a model tenancy agreement that will be available for landlords and tenants to use (although they will not be required to use it) as the basis for longer family-friendly tenancies, where that is what they choose. The government is working with mortgage lenders to overcome the restrictions on longer term tenancies that are included in most mortgage agreements.

40. The government has consulted on a draft Tenants' Charter, which will be used to ensure that tenants and landlords are better informed of their rights and responsibilities. This will make clear that longer tenancies can be considered, and sign-post where to complain if landlords do not fulfil their responsibilities.

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[18] English Housing Survey 2011-12 - Headline Report

[19] English Housing Survey - Households Report 2011-12

[20] Why governments should not enforce long-term contracts in the UK's private rented sector - Professor Michael Ball, October 2013.

Rent increases

41. Levels of private rent are actually declining in real terms and rose by only 1.0 per cent in England in the 12 months to December 2013[21] compared to inflation of 2 per cent as of December[22]. Even in London, where pressures on privately rented accommodation are greatest, private rents are only increasing at 1.6 per cent. The number of tenants in severe rental arrears has fallen sharply - 26 per cent fewer households were in severe arrears in the final quarter of 2013 compared to the same period in 2012[23].

42. Whilst the government is not in favour of a new system of rent controls, mechanisms already exist for tenants to challenge excessive rent increases via the First Tier Tribunal (Property).

43. However, the best way of keeping the level of rent increases at a moderate level is to boost the supply of housing to the sector. The government has been encouraging investment in building new homes for rent in a number of ways:

- It set up a Private Rented Sector Taskforce, which has so far identified over 30 organisations, with aspirations to invest over £10 billion in the private rented sector;
- It has established Housing Guarantees schemes totalling £10 billion, of which £3.5 billion is for affordable housing and £3.5 billion for the private rented sector, with £3 billion in reserve for either scheme.
- It has established a Build to Rent Fund totalling £1 billion. Already, two contracts from the first round of bids have been signed (in Southampton and Manchester) and more are in the pipeline. Furthermore, 126 bids were received under a second round, seeking total funding of approximately £2.8 billion.

Rogue landlords, letting agents, discrimination

44. The government recognises that there is a small minority of private landlords who fail to meet their basic obligations to their tenants, accommodating them in overcrowded and unsafe accommodation. Local authorities have an extensive range of powers, mainly under the Housing Act 2004, to deal with these rogue landlords. They have extensive enforcement powers against properties that are in an unsafe condition, and have the discretion to introduce licensing regimes in areas where the private rented sector is causing difficulties of low demand or anti-social behaviour.

45. The government has provided additional funding to supplement local authorities' resources in tackling rogue landlords. £4.1 million was allocated to 23 local authorities in December 2013 to tackle rogue landlords. This follows an earlier allocation of £2.6 million to crack down on landlords who force tenants into unsuitable properties, known as 'beds in sheds'.

46. The government has announced a review of the system for ensuring that privately rented homes are safe and healthy and is currently consulting interested organisations including local authorities, landlord associations, housing charities, tenant groups and professional bodies. It is anticipated that the outcome of the review will be announced in the summer. Consideration is being given to requiring landlords to repay rent where a property is found to have serious hazards.

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[21] ONS Index of Private Housing Rental Prices, September to December 2013 (24 January 2014)
[22] ONS Consumer Price Index Statistics, December 2013 (14 January 2014)
[23] Tenant Arrears Tracker, LSL Property Services plc, Quarter to December 2013 (21 January 2014)

47. The government is aware that a minority of letting agents offer a poor service to landlords and tenants, charging fees that are not always transparent. It is introducing legislation to require all letting and property management agents to become members of an approved redress scheme, so that consumers can complain and seek compensation if agents' fees are not transparent. These requirements will come into force from October 2014. A new code of practice will be published, setting standards for the management of property in the private rented sector. It is anticipated that this will eventually be given a statutory basis, to provide greater confidence for tenants in what they can expect.

48. On the subject of discrimination, the government is aware of allegations that some letting agents are willing to act unlawfully in accepting instructions from clients to discriminate against certain races in letting out properties. This is currently being explored by the Equalities and Human Rights Commission, and the government looks forward to the EHRC's findings. The government will also issue a code of practice on discrimination as part of an introduction of new requirements on landlords to check the migration status of new tenants.

V. Investing in social housing

49. The UNSR's report recommends that the government should 'extend and expand grants and subsidies for social housing (for local councils and housing associations), as these have been essential in responding to the housing need of the most vulnerable. More resources and allocations are needed in this area to ensure that new developments address the specific needs of those individuals and households, and that a variety of tenure forms are encouraged, promoted and protected. Special attention must be given to the situation of low-income people and households, especially children'

50. Our approach is to significantly expand the provision of affordable homes by increasing the contribution from private investment whilst empowering local authorities to play a strong role in assessing what is needed in their local area.

51. In June 2013, the Government underlined its long term commitment to affordable housing, by providing £3.3 billion of public money which, alongside around £20 billion of private investment, to support the delivery of 165,000 additional affordable homes from April 2015. This builds on the already strong track record of this Government, with over 170,000 affordable homes delivered over the last three years[24].

52. The £3.3 billion of government funding up to 2018, alongside long term rent certainty up to 2025, provides the investment framework that providers need to make longer term building plans. There is no reduction compared to the current programme, which provided £4.5 billion over 4 years. The competition for grant will drive efficiencies and secure the maximum amount of private finance.

53. Affordable Rent, introduced in 2011, allows the government to deliver more homes for every pound of upfront government investment, so more people benefit from subsidised housing - with lower rents and more security - than if they were in the private rented sector. Housing Benefit still covers the full rent for tenants who cannot afford to pay, where they are not under occupying.

[24] DCLG Affordable Housing Supply, 2012-13, DCLG; Affordable housing starts and completions funded by the HCA and GLA, April-September 2013 (21 November 2013)

54. Rent levels in the Affordable Homes Programme are at a range of levels up to 80% of local market rents, to ensure fit with local circumstances, with, for example, average affordable rents of 65% in London.

55. This government has also introduced a more flexible approach to social tenancies to enable tenancies to be matched more closely to local needs. Councils and housing associations can now offer shorter fixed term tenancies (usually of at least five years) as well as 'lifetime' tenancies to new tenants where that makes more sense. Those who were tenants at 1 April 2012 will see no changes to their rights to lifetime tenancy.

56. As well as building more new affordable homes, the government is also continuing to invest significantly in improving the quality of the existing social housing stock.

57. Over £2 billion is being invested for 2011-15 to support local authorities and housing associations in bringing homes up to the Decent Homes standard and a further £160 million has been committed for 2015-16.

58. The proportion of council homes which do not meet the standard has fallen to 11% and we expect this to reduce further[25]. Nearly 99% of the social rented stock of housing associations now meets the Decent Homes Standard.

VI. Supporting Gypsy and Traveller Communities

59. The UNSR's report recommends that the government should 'strengthen efforts to address stigma and discrimination for the Gypsy and Traveller communities in relation to the wider spectrum of rights, starting with the recognition that cultural adequacy in housing is a pillar for inclusion, and that legislation and policy are not enough to overcome local obstacles.'

60. Improving social mobility is a principal goal of the government's social policy. We are determined to give everyone the ability and aspiration to prosper, breaking down barriers to social mobility. Across government we are very concerned that Gypsies and Travellers experience some of the worst outcomes of any group across a range of social indicators and in November 2010, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government brought together ministers from key government departments to look at ways to reduce and tackle these inequalities.

61. In April 2012 the Ministerial Working Group published a progress report setting out 28 commitments from across government. These include:

- Piloting a 'virtual headteacher' who will champion the interests of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils across their local authority and respond to issues of low attainment and attendance
- Promoting improved health outcomes for Gypsies and Travellers within the new structures of the National Health Service
- Improving knowledge of how Gypsies and Travellers engage with employment services
- Preventing hate crime, increasing reporting of incide ts and challenging the attitudes that underpin it
- Ensuring access to appropriate rehabilitation activities in prison and on probation.

[25] *DCLG Local Authority Housing Statistics 2012-13, England (19 December 2013)*

62. We are reviewing progress on meeting these commitments and will publish a further progress report in due course.

63. In terms of providing authorised sites, we believe that local authorities are best placed to assess and plan for what is needed in their local areas and our national planning policy requires them to do that, as they would for a settled community. Seventy five per cent of local planning authorities now have a Local Plan at the publication stage or beyond.

64. To encourage the provision of new sites the government has secured a £60 million Traveller Pitch Fund to help local authorities and other registered providers build traveller sites. The programme is currently forecast to deliver around 600 new and 400 refurbished pitches by 2015.

65. Local authorities also have a financial incentive to provide sites under the New Homes Bonus. In addition, the government has funded the Local Government Association to deliver courses for elected councillors on their leadership role around traveller site provision and almost 30 sessions have been delivered to around 900 people.

66. In April 2011 we brought into force section 318 of the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 which applies the Mobile Homes Act 1983 to traveller sites owned by local authorities. This means that residents of these sites now have greater protection against eviction, and other rights and responsibilities that already applied to residents of other residential mobile sites.

67. We remain concerned about unauthorised sites and the disruption and expense they can cause for local communities. Too often, local authorities and landowners feel powerless to stop unauthorised encampments and development but in fact there are extensive powers available to deal with them. The government has reviewed those powers and recently sent all council leaders updated guidance, reminding them to act swiftly and setting out the strong powers councils and landowners have to remove illegal and unauthorised sites on both public and private land.

VII. Preventing and tackling homelessness

68. The UNSR's report recommends the government should 'promote and protect the right to adequate housing without discrimination on any grounds; in particular, refrain from establishing mechanisms that can result in indirect discrimination against migrants or Roma in access to adequate housing.'

69. The government is committed to preventing and tackling homelessness and has retained a strong safety net underpinned by legislation that protects vulnerable people. Councils have a legal duty to house families and vulnerable people who are unintentionally homeless and in priority need.

70. The government has made available nearly £1 billion over the current spending round to prevent and tackle homelessness. The most recent statistics show a 4 per cent drop in homelessness acceptances across England compared with same quarter last year[26] and homelessness is lower now than in 27 of last 30 years.[27] Repossessions fell to 33,900 in 2012[28], the lowest annual total since 2007.

[26] DCLG Statutory Homelessness, July to September Quarter 2013, England (05 December 2013)

[27] Based on data from DCLG homelessness statistics up to December 2012 (published 22 March 2013)

[28] Council of Mortgage Lenders Research, Arrears and Mortgage Possessions (11 November 2013)

71. We also remain committed to tackling roughsleeping and are supporting the wider roll out of a scheme which started in London, 'No Second Night Out', which helps get rough sleepers off the streets quickly. We are also investing in hostels for rough sleepers, with £42.5 million being spent nationally for 1,500 new and refurbished bed spaces.

72. The government believes that migrants who come to the UK should be well prepared before they arrive and to help promote this message we are supporting a campaign 'Before You Go' that aims to provide information to migrant workers from Eastern Europe.

VIII. Building more homes through increasing land availability

73. The UNSR's report recommends that the government should:

- *Ensure that current measures to release public land to tackle lack of availability of housing favour social and affordable housing, including through local councils, housing associations, cooperatives and community land trusts;*
- *Consider the inclusion in planning and land management systems of strict conditions for immediate development of land with planning permits, "build-or-lose" safeguards and priority for affordable housing'*

74. Local authorities are well placed through their planning role to influence the housing development and land supply in their local area. Our national planning policies require local authorities to determine locally what is needed in terms of housing, including affordable housing, and to identify and maintain a five year supply of land that is suitable for development.

75. To support them we are releasing land for housing development by supporting the development of large housing sites and releasing public sector land.

76. To support the development of large housing sites:

- The government has made £474 million available through the local infrastructure investment to unlock development on stalled housing sites and commercial developments.
- We have already invested £76.7 million capital and nearly £6 million of capacity funding to enable 11 large-scale, locally supported housing schemes which will help unlock 69,000 new homes.
- We are also working to finalise investment deals on a further 10 stalled schemes, to deliver up to 35,000 more homes.
- In addition, we recently announced a £1 billion recoverable capital investment over 6 years, to 2019-20 to fund the infrastructure needed to release large scale sites in areas of high housing demand. We expect this to support delivery of around 250,000 new homes.

77. To release public sector land the government has identified land with capacity for over 100,000 homes that we are aiming to release by March 2015. At the end of December 2013 we had released enough land to build 68,000 homes.

78. We are also helping to create the right conditions for growth by increasing the incentives for developers to start their housing schemes on site before planning permission expires, which is usually after three years. To achieve this, in September 2013, we withdrew the temporary measure (introduced by the previous Administration) that allowed developers to roll forward their planning permissions. The expiration of planning

permissions after a certain period of time is a well established feature of the planning system and this is the right time to reinstate this.

IX. Devolved administrations

79. The UNSR's report recommends that in Northern Ireland the government should 'put in place additional efforts to address challenges to overcome persistent inequalities in housing in North Belfast. For this purpose, active, free and meaningful participation of all in decisions made about housing should be promoted, including in relation to the collection of official data, that should be disaggregated, open and accessible to all'

80. The UNSR make various references to the housing situation in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. As housing is a matter for the devolved administrations, it is not appropriate for the UK government to respond to these points.